



THE UNIVERSITY *of* EDINBURGH

## Edinburgh Research Explorer

### **Progressive education parallels? A critical comparison of early 20th century America and early 21st century Scotland**

**Citation for published version:**

Thorburn, M 2017, 'Progressive education parallels? A critical comparison of early 20th century America and early 21st century Scotland', *International Journal of Educational Research*.  
<https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.10.003>

**Digital Object Identifier (DOI):**

[10.1016/j.ijer.2017.10.003](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.ijer.2017.10.003)

**Link:**

[Link to publication record in Edinburgh Research Explorer](#)

**Document Version:**

Peer reviewed version

**Published In:**

International Journal of Educational Research

**General rights**

Copyright for the publications made accessible via the Edinburgh Research Explorer is retained by the author(s) and / or other copyright owners and it is a condition of accessing these publications that users recognise and abide by the legal requirements associated with these rights.

**Take down policy**

The University of Edinburgh has made every reasonable effort to ensure that Edinburgh Research Explorer content complies with UK legislation. If you believe that the public display of this file breaches copyright please contact [openaccess@ed.ac.uk](mailto:openaccess@ed.ac.uk) providing details, and we will remove access to the work immediately and investigate your claim.



# **Progressive education parallels? A critical comparison of early 20<sup>th</sup> century America and early 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland**

## **Abstract**

Curriculum for Excellence in Scotland is at a watershed moment. The task, in order to meet new global circumstances, is to encourage bold and innovative thinking on learning and teaching, lessen the attainment gap for socially disadvantaged learners and increase vocational learning. These challenges closely reflect those of early 20<sup>th</sup> century America, where administrative progressives with an interest in school governance and curriculum arrangements pursued an agenda at odds with pedagogical progressives, who encouraged by the multiple writings of John Dewey, afforded a greater emphasis to the interests of the child. Critically analysing these tensions, through a detailed review of the Gary Schools Plan in Gary, Indiana highlights many of the concerns and influences Scottish education needs to critically consider.

**Key words:** Progressive education; Administrative progressivism; Pedagogical progressivism; Gary Schools Plan; Scotland

## **Introduction**

A recent report by the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) (2015) notes that Scottish education is at a key transition point where the implementation period of the all-encompassing (3-18 years) learner centered, capacity building Curriculum for Excellence (CfE) is complete and a new phase of policy enactment is beginning. The OECD (2015, p. 100) considers that a ‘degree of boldness’ is required to ‘empower our teachers to make the best decisions for children and young people’ (Scottish Government, 2016b, p. 1) and to avoid the negative consequences associated with micro-management tussles between central government and local (unitary) authorities over control of education and schools (OECD, 2015). Whatever changes are ahead they are likely to take place within existing comprehensive schooling structures, as the Scottish Government (2016b, 1) remains committed to this model of schooling as ‘evidence shows that co-operation and collaboration, not competition or marketisation drives improvement.’ The near uniform commitment to comprehensive provision can be viewed as an expression of Scottish unity and identity and ‘as a reflection of democracy

and communal solidarity and demonstration that opportunities to succeed should be available to all learners' (Bryce & Humes, 2013, p. 51). Such an allegiance is currently most evident in the relentless endeavour to achieve greater equity in education through closing the attainment gap for those learners disadvantaged by the effects of poverty and in plans to devolve increased school management to head teachers (Scottish Government, 2016a).

CfE aims to achieve greater curriculum coherence through learners developing four capacities (i.e., to become successful learners, confident individuals, effective contributors and responsible citizens) with improved learning transfer intended across the ages and stages of child development (Scottish Executive, 2004). Since the announcement of CfE, emphasis and attention has been on articulating how the capacities can be developed through learning in specified curriculum areas (i.e., language, mathematics, science, expressive arts, social studies, technologies, religious and moral education along with the new disciplinary area of health and wellbeing) as well as emphasizing the *across* learning responsibility all teachers have in three particular areas - literacy, numeracy and health and wellbeing (Scottish Government, 2008). These arrangements reflect a partial engagement with the therapeutic culture ambitions which are a particular concern of governments and supra national bodies with an interest in equity, social justice and the emotional wellbeing of young people (Author, 2016). This is further evident through the merging of a traditional subject-based curriculum with the four newly set out generic contexts for learning (i.e., the ethos and life of the school as a community, curriculum areas and subjects, interdisciplinary learning and opportunities for personal achievement) which are collectively designed to help learners identify and take on more responsibility for their progress (Scottish Government, 2008). Additionally, there is an overarching 'skills for learning, skills for

life and skills for work' focus, so schools have a responsibility as well for developing thinking skills across learning, personal learning planning and career management, working with others, leadership, physical co-ordination and movement and enterprise and employability' (Scottish Government, 2009). This emphasis was applauded by a recent Scottish Government (2014, p. 8) report that 'young people of all abilities should have the opportunity to follow industry relevant vocational pathways alongside academic studies.' This busy mix of influences and intentions highlights that as far as Drew (2013, p. 502) is concerned CfE represents 'a bold attempt to build on the strengths of Scottish education whilst introducing a radical new approach to prepare children and young people to address some of the challenges they would face beyond school in the twenty-first century.' Cameron (2013, p. 204) also believes that the CfE model has much to recommend it, as Scotland needs 'in a very short space of time to work together to turn the supertanker that is Scottish education around from a knowledge-driven, largely conformist curriculum to a skills-driven, explicitly personalised one.'

A century ago educators in the United States of America (USA) faced similar challenges to present day Scotland. What characterised discussions between *administrative and pedagogical progressives* in the USA was the divide between administrative progressives interest in school governance and curriculum arrangements and *pedagogical progressives*, who informed primarily by the multiple writings of John Dewey, afforded a greater emphasis to the interests of the child. Tyack (1974) coined the terms 'administrative progressives' and 'pedagogical progressives', and this paper utilises these definitions by concurring with Labaree (2005) that the administrative category fits with a conservative and social efficiency emphasis and the pedagogical category fits with a liberal and social re-constructivist emphasis, with child development spanning the two.

Cohen and Mohl (1979, p. 173) also consider that administrative progressivism should be seen 'as a conservative-orientated movement - one which sought to reassert the dominance of elites in society and politics, one which sought to restore the freedom of the individual which was fast disappearing before the forces of immigration, industrialization and urbanization.' This in a school context would manifest itself in empowering superintendents / Head teachers to use business methods and efficiency gains to secure stability and order during a time of change. By contrast, *pedagogical* progressivism is more focussed on improving the conditions of the poor through the efforts of those working directly in schools and through the implementation of legislation and government programmes which specifically benefit the disadvantaged.

Crucially, administrative and pedagogical progressives are despite their differences united in recognising that schools are fundamental to reforming society (Cohen & Mohl, 1979). This paper therefore examines the key features of administrative *and* pedagogical progressivism with particular reference to the Gary Schools Plan in Gary Indiana (a new steel making city on the southern shores of Lake Michigan) which was organised 'on the notion that schools should offer a maximum of education and social services while pedagogically running at full throttle, much like the nearby industrial plants' (Reese, 2002, p. 10). Under the leadership of William Wirt, the Gary Schools Plan merged a progressive focus on academic subjects and vocational education, with the combination of intellectual and practical teaching extending into the evening with further time available for additional work in areas of interest. By running classroom and vocational programmes concurrently schools could be efficient in the use of public facilities with twice the number of pupils (organised into platoons) being in attendance relative to the norm in

other schools. This mix of work-study-play was also designed to integrate schools more closely with their local communities.

Given the above research context the paper aims to critically review:

- the development of administrative and pedagogical progressivism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century American education
- the extent to which the Gary Plan was driven by administrative efficiency and/or pedagogical progressivism
- the extent to which pedagogical progressivism can drive educational reforms in contemporary Scotland

### **The development of administrative and pedagogical progressivism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century American education**

Accompanying John Dewey and William Wirt's shared interest in education was the idea that new urban industrial-age living could stifle the growth of learners experiences and undermine the contribution rural living made in terms of 'character building, physical development and vocational training' (Cohen & Mohl, 1979, p. 11). Laberee (2005, p. 281) posits that the sense of threat to older country ways manifest itself in a new naturalistic 'pedagogy (which arises from the needs, interests and capacities of the child ...) and a skill-based curriculum (which focuses on providing the child with the learning skills that can be used to acquire whatever knowledge he or she desires).' These developments were advocated by pedagogical progressives on the basis that the developmental capacities of learners and the holistic potential of learning (taught through thematic projects) was preferable to the utilitarianism and social efficiency benefits of subject

teaching advanced by administrative progressives. For example, the governance and structure concerns of the administrative progressives was on differentiating learners' abilities and matching these to the new occupational employment opportunities available. The most straightforward way to achieve this was to expand curriculum options according to learners' interests and changing vocational patterns. Sometimes changes along these lines were not easy to detect e.g., Angus and Mirel (1999) highlight that even by the 1930s learners were still learning through traditional academic subjects. Nevertheless, administrative progressives claim that a form of social reconstruction was being achieved, as subject teaching was more clearly accommodating courses at multiple levels with multiple entry and exit points. However, as the ability approach to differentiation could also reproduce social inequalities, pedagogical progressives remained perplexed by the inaccessibility of top-down curriculum arrangements (even when a degree of subject choice was available). This concern was predicated on the relatively socially-conservative view that structural changes in education brought about by new industrial-age living should not corrupt the importance of learners interest and the shared values which have supported family and community wellbeing over time.

Hindering the pursuit of pedagogical progressive claims was that following a relatively brief period at the University of Chicago between 1896 and 1904, John Dewey (a leading figure of the progressive education movement) moved onto to take up a Professorship in the Department of Philosophy at Columbia University in New York in 1905. From this time onwards, Dewey was less involved with the detail of learning and teaching and more concerned with writing about education from a plethora of broader perspectives. This contributed to the administrative progressives influence on education remaining relatively unchecked. For as Lagemann (1989, p.

200) notes, ‘Dewey’s concern for efficiency and system was probably the least well developed aspect of his thinking about educational research’. Thus, while the pedagogical progressives made some gains in personalising the curriculum, progress was generally modest and variable and frequently only part of small private school experiments which existed for modest amounts of time with few learners and generous staff/learner ratios. Dewey’s privately funded Laboratory School at the University of Chicago was one of the exceptions. It started with 16 pupils and two teachers in 1896 but by 1902 had 140 pupils, 23 instructors and ten assistants (Cremin, 1961). Therefore, the Laboratory School became one of the more thorough attempts to understand better how learners could engage in new social situations, work cooperatively and apply scientific methods (Cremin, 1961). However, in terms of system wide progress the administrative progressives tended to influence political leaders and educational policy makers more than the pedagogical progressives did as the administrative progressives were able to connect more readily with the societal benefits of enhanced social efficiency relative to the liberal and pedagogical progressives with their championing of enhanced social opportunity (Lagemann, 1989).

### **The extent to which the Gary Plan was driven by administrative efficiency and/or pedagogical progressivism**

The Gary Schools Plan had similar intentions to the Laboratory School at the University of Chicago. However, it was a rare public school attempt to investigate the possibilities of progressive education. As Cremin (1961) notes, the further one reads in *Schools of Tomorrow* (Dewey & Dewey, 1915) the more comprehensive the examples become with the schools of Gary, Indiana, coming last and being elaborated on in most detail. Therefore, even though the



descriptive approach adopted by Dewey and Dewey (1915) was essentially journalistic with the intention being to ‘elucidate rather than to praise or criticise’ (Cremin, 1961, p. 153), the Gary Plan is worth analysing as it has the stamp of progressive authenticity about it (Bourne, 1916/1970).

William Wirt (1874-1938) entered De Pauw University in 1892 and attended intermittently until 1899. During this period, Wirt also attended summer classes at the University of Chicago which ‘exposed Wirt to John Dewey’s school innovations ...’ (Cohen, 2002, p. 2). In 1899, Wirt became superintendent of schools at Bluffton, and while his views of the platoon system and multiple use of facilities had yet to take shape, Wirt was clear that children should find it natural to want to go to school and that schools should attempt to broaden the curriculum, extend flexibility within the school day and improve school facilities (Cohen, 2002). Wirt began his thirty-year tenure as the first superintendent of schools in Gary, Indiana in 1907 and was credited as being able to show ‘how his plan could produce more classes at a lower cost, while including innovative features in curriculum and methods, in school building, and in the relationship of the schools to other community resources’ (Levine & Levine, 1970, p. xxx). Wirt ideas were predicated on only two fixed principles i.e., that ‘all children should be busy all day long at work, study and play under right conditions’ and that the facilities of the entire community are properly coordinated so that they supplement one another (Bourne, 1916/1970, p. lxxv). Key to expanding the curriculum was integrating vocationally related manual training with academic subjects in order to draw upon the latest curriculum theories (Cohen, 2002). This was aided by an expansion in the use of specialist teachers to ensure that learners’ broad general education connected with their world beyond school e.g., regular English classes were supported by

application periods where learners in practical classes discussed the English used in their work. This method dovetails with Dewey's view of their needing to be a middle ground between education being 'child-centered without turning it into an activity totally lacking in discipline and guidance' (Lagemann, 1989, p. 198). The scope of Wirt's vision and plan meant that by 1911 many teachers and social reformers, both nationally (including Evelyn Dewey) and internationally were interested in visiting the two Gary schools (Emerson and Frobel) with visitor numbers needing capped and access restricted at times (Levine & Levine, 1970).

During the infancy of Wirt's career, John Dewey produced many influential writings, including: *Interest in Relation to the Training of the Will* (Dewey, 1896/1973); *My Pedagogic Creed* (Dewey, 1897/1973) and *The Child and the Curriculum and The School and Society* (Dewey, 1899/2008). Collectively these writings had a progressive focus on how creative pedagogies could 'promote children's intellectual and social growth, which seemed stunted in classrooms dominated by mindless memorisation and pupil passivity' (Reese, 2013, p. 326). As Dewey (1899/2008) summarises it:

when the school introduces and trains each child of society into membership within such a little community, saturating him with the spirit of service, and providing him with the instruments of effective self-direction, we shall see the deepest and best guaranty of a larger society which is worthy, lovely and harmonious (29).

Cremin (1961) considers that these progressive intentions were rich with integrated learning possibilities that could effectively merge the intrinsic with the instrumental through tapping into

the interests of the child as well as affording opportunities for societal flourishing. All of these gains where possible, provided the teacher is sufficiently expert in their subject, and aware of how common childhood influences can be utilized pedagogically to connect self-expression with the achievement of ends (Dewey, 1913). If successful, three fundamental types of subject matter: *active* in terms of vocational pursuits of occupations; *social* through topics associated with history and geography and *intellectual* e.g. reading, grammar and mathematical can be taken forward in an ordered scientific curriculum that benefits society (Dewey, 1899; 1916).

Dewey and Dewey (1915) considered that these areas of subject matter were evident in the Gary Schools as they only had to observe the pupils hard at work to be convinced that the children are happy and interested and working towards shared *social* and community ideas. In addition, the Gary Schools benefitted from in-school vocational education (*active*) courses which were not separated from school education and completed in factories, as this approach perpetuates class divisions, limits individual opportunity and hinders the development of the USA as a modern industrial democracy. Furthermore, there was evidence of merging vocational education with academic education (*intellectual*) with learners being given an enhanced responsibility for their work. Collectively, the benefits of this approach were reflected in the progression routes achieved by learners, for as Dewey and Dewey (1915) found, higher than average rates of University entrance were achieved by learners from the Gary Schools. This shows how ‘successful Mr. Wirt has been in making a system which meets the needs of the pupils, a system that appeals to the community and so good that they want to go on and get more education than mere necessity dictates’ (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, p. 322). Aiding this success was subject setting, whereby learners were ‘classified as rapid, normal, or slow learners and on the basis of

tests and interviews each youngster was assigned his own individual program' (Cremin, 1961, pp. 156-157).

In June 1914, Evelyn Dewey spent two days observing education in action at the Gary Schools. In January, 1915, Evelyn Dewey wrote to Wirt with proofs of one of the two chapters she wrote for *Schools of Tomorrow*, in the 'hope it represents the sort of explanation that you like to have given of the schools.'<sup>1</sup> Westbrook (1991, p. 181) considers that greater 'firsthand observation (by John Dewey) might have led to a more critical perspective on Wirt's handiwork...'. Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970) provide this type of perspective with their field observations taking place between February and June 1916 and their report being published in late 1918 following the cross-checking of manuscripts between Flexner and Wirt. Flexner was a member of the General Education Board in New York and had been invited by Wirt to conduct a detailed review of the Gary Plan as there were intentions to extend the plan to New York (Cohen, 2002). Despite praising the ambition of the Gary Plan, Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970, p. 220) expressed concern over the extent to which Wirt had control over his business management *and* educational role, as there is a 'danger of collapse somewhere unless the superintendent's hand is distinctly felt in both the main fields of responsibility.' Dewey and Dewey (1915, p. 326) recount more neutrally, that Wirt believed that the school principal or superintendent should be first and foremost a business manager or administrative officer while the educational policies of schools should be the responsibility of subject teachers (experts) 'who are free from the details of administration.' This is despite John Dewey's own position that educational administrators should be teachers, who carry out temporary administrative responsibilities (Lagemann, 1989).

---

<sup>1</sup> Letter from Evelyn Dewey to William Wirt, January 12, 1915, William A Wirt Manuscripts, Lilly library, Indiana University, Bloomington.

Within these arrangements ‘educational supervision was of a general concern only’ with teachers largely left to realise educational aims in their own ways (Flexner & Bachman (1918/1970, p. 221). Thus, while there were innovative attempts for more able learners to help other learners and for older learners to hold various school wide roles and responsibilities, there was a lack of rigour in supervising how educational intentions were being taken forward and reviewed. This view contrasts with the Dewey’s who considered that ‘the two-school system works so that an individual can spend more or less time on any one subject, or drop it altogether’ (Dewey & Dewey, 1915, 330). Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970) however believed that learners were able to use the lax administration arrangements to make timetable decisions based on personal choice, rather their learning priorities. As the authors note, this resulted in considerable deviations from the standard timetable with 54 digressions from the official class programmes noted, of ‘which only three were to afford additional academic instruction - one in arithmetic and two in English’ (1918/1970, p. 229). Thus, ‘with five or six exceptions all the changes were the result of childish caprice exercised without restraint’ (1918/1970, pp. 230-231).

What generally pervades the Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970, p. 237) analysis is a sense of scepticism over the possibilities for pedagogical progressivist reform, as the Gary Schools ‘failed to appreciate the extreme difficulty of converting new educational principles into new educational practice’ and for reforms to proceed ‘a new body of teaching material ... and teachers of a new type’ are needed (p. 238). Without this occurring, teaching rarely progressed from a central integrated task with much of the primary teaching being rather staid with subject departmentalization increasing rather than lessening difficulties. As such, teaching was

predominantly ‘of the ordinary type (and) ineffectually controlled’ due to weak administration (Flexner & Bachman, 1918/1970, p. 256). Therefore, ‘it is evident that the Gary experiment has not yet successfully solved the problems involved in the socialization of education, in so far as efficient instruction in the necessary common school branches is concerned’ (Flexner & Bachman, 1918/1970, p. 264) with the authors considering that making improvements in learning required an emphasis on ‘order, persistence and hard work’ to accompany a latent interest in learning (1918/1970, p. 229). Thus, while Flexner and Bachman believe that while the Gary Schools provided facilities which have ‘attempted to practice democratic theory in school conduct and discipline’ (1918/1970, p. 301), the authors also note defective school organisation and educational supervision. As such, ‘one cannot avoid the conclusion that a large and generous scheme, distinguished by intelligence and vision in conception falls short in the execution’ (1918/1970, p. 308). This finding deeply affected Flexner as it marked the ‘evolution of his own position from moderate progressivism ... to unrelenting antiprogessivism’ (Cremin, 1961, p. 160).

### **The extent to which pedagogical progressivism can drive educational reforms in contemporary Scotland**

In contemporary America, Labaree (2005, p. 277) considers that pedagogical progressivism requires a focus on child-centered education and the developmental needs of learners with an emphasis on holistic and interdisciplinary learning that integrates the disciplines around socially relevant themes as well as ‘promoting values of community, cooperation, tolerance, justice and democratic equality.’ This description of pedagogical progressivism articulates closely with many of the aspirations of CfE, where the capacity building framework encourages teachers to

make greater use of their increased professional autonomy and decision-making responsibilities when reviewing curriculum plans to realise CfE ambitions through teaching familiar subject areas via four newly identified contexts of learning (Scottish Government, 2008).

However, the claimed educational benefits of these intentions are only partially endorsed by Paterson (2014) who believes that it was only until around 1990 when a wide interpretation of a ‘traditional liberal curriculum of a predominantly intellectual character ... of the kind that could provide a secure basis for democracy’ (p. 409) was in place. Since then Scottish education has been under threat by constructivist-informed methodologies and the emphasis afforded to learners’ motivation. Due to these concerns, Paterson (2014) considers that it will be difficult for forthcoming generations to pass on the life enhancing benefits of a liberal education, with its intellectual rather than civic focus and with a degree of measured selection and competition ensuring that necessary administrative progressivism concerns e.g., the social efficiency benefits of identifying the right students to progress to Higher Education are met. Overall, Priestley and Humes (2010) doubt the extent to which CfE is an ambitious, progressive and learner-centred programme of education and believe that it is really a mastery outcomes-led curriculum masquerading as a process-based curriculum. Under this guise pedagogical progressivists can applaud the aspiration of CfE even though policy implementation may lead to learning opportunities failing to result in the type of social reconstruction planned e.g., in the current policy context of reducing the attainment gap between socially advantaged and less advantaged learners. Furthermore, as the responsibility for CfE implementation largely resides with teachers, failure to enact policy over time can be seen as both a pedagogical weakness (weak teaching) and an administrative concern (limited accountability). In addition, it is recognised that CfE changes

in curriculum thinking have not thus far suitably included vocational education. Accordingly, there is an imperative towards schools embedding the development of a broader range of skills for work (Scottish Government, 2009) which includes learners of all abilities having as they move into the senior phase of secondary schooling (15-18 years) the opportunity to merge vocational and academic studies (Scottish Government, 2014). Clearly, the expectations of teachers are high in terms of being subject experts (in a diverse range of awards), progressive child centered educators capable of enhancing learners' capacities and of improving their lifelong skills for life and work. Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970) note that the breadth of the conception of the Gary Schools plan made it enormously difficult to obtain 'a teaching and supervising staff capable of executing the plan.' A century on in Scotland the aforementioned challenges raises questions about how teachers can meet national expectations (Scottish Government, 2011).

Amidst these challenges, there remains a continuing policy enthusiasm for bold and progressive thinking about how to improve equity and excellence in Scottish education (OECD, 2015; Scottish Government, 2016a). This is in spite of, as Humes (1986) notes, the leadership in Scottish education in the period around the 1960s to the 1980s being defined by administrative and bureaucratic protocols. In this context, the democratic and egalitarian ideals underpinning Scottish education were poorly articulated 'with the extremely hierarchical way in which the system is organised ... and the concentration of power in the hands of a relatively small group of mutually admiring people' (Humes, 1986, p. 201). More recently, Cavanagh (2013) considers that the power of Head teachers (HT) remains diminished from what it was historically and is further demeaned by an increase in accountability at the same time as there is lessening in their



capacity to meaningfully influence change. Thus, ‘the attractive notion of the HT as the leader of learning will be nothing other than hollow rhetoric’ (Cavanagh, 2013, p. 398). These points raise concerns about the extent to which present-day leadership approaches in Scottish education can support pedagogical progressivism during a time of economic restraint and uncertainty; or whether as with Dewey and Wirt, there is a position where administrative and pedagogical progressivists can support each other and work cooperatively and effectively together. These are important matters in modern-day Scotland as there is a political drive towards strengthening networks and collaborations in-and-between schools and in-and-across local authorities (OECD, 2015). Greater flexibility and responsiveness plans aim to help overcome variability in performance between authorities, promote fairer funding through plans to extend devolved school management and further empower teachers through in part reducing the unintended workload gains which have become part of CfE (Scottish Government, 2016a, 2016b). In addition, in response to teachers concerns, the intention is to significantly streamline the range of guidance and material teachers need to review as this has become cumbersome and unwieldy.

At face value these government led attempts seem to have strong and innovative elements of progressive and administrative progressivism working together in planning for the future. But will it work and will improvements be sustainable? Clearly, the parallels drawn between early 20<sup>th</sup> century America and early 21<sup>st</sup> century Scotland can only take us so far, especially as the Gary Schools plan is a single site example relative to the national situation being reviewed in the case of Scotland. That said the added business responsibilities taken on with enthusiasm by Wirt did seem to come at a cost to his educational influence, with all that this led to in terms of effective supervision and academic leadership. Furthermore, it is untested at present whether

Scottish Head teachers' want these added business management responsibilities at a time when the intention is to reduce teacher stress and workload, or whether they would prefer instead a more enhanced acknowledgement for their academic guidance and wise counsel during a period of considerable curriculum change. These types of concerns raise the possibility that the variability present at this time within a comprehensive system of education may shift from one area of concern i.e. 'low-performing authorities' (OECD, 2015, p. 17) to selected schools which become for whatever reasons temporarily overstretched.

## **Conclusion**

The intention of this paper was to critically contrast progressive education in early 20<sup>th</sup> century American education with early 21<sup>st</sup> century education in Scotland. It aimed to do this through reviewing: the development of administrative and pedagogical progressivism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century American education; the extent to which the Gary Plan was driven by administrative efficiency and/or pedagogical progressivism and the extent to which pedagogical progressivism informs educational reforms in Scotland. In reviewing, the development of administrative and pedagogical progressivism in early 20<sup>th</sup> century American education, Labaree (2005) considers that the administrative progressives won the tussle for control, as political leaders as well as educational policy makers, typically favoured their position on the benefits of societal efficiency over liberal and progressive attempts to enhance social opportunity. This situation remains to this day with administrative progressives to the fore in 'establishing rigorous academic frameworks for the school curriculum, setting performance standards for students, and using high stakes testing to motivate students to learn the curriculum and teachers to teach it' (Labaree, 2005, p. 277). Meanwhile, the pedagogical progressives pose little current threat to the administrative

progressives, as the pedagogical progressives have been left to pursue their causes within University Schools of Education, while having little influence on achieving and sustaining educational change in schools (Laberee, 2005).

In reviewing the extent to which the Gary Plan was driven by administrative efficiency and/or pedagogical progressivism, it is evident that Wirt was committed primarily to an advanced form of administrative progressivism which contained a focus on keeping learners busy (in part by trying new ideas) with a priority towards subject knowledge and vocational preparation. In this light, it might be considered that Flexner and Bachman (1918/1970) rather underappreciated the gains made at the Gary Schools in advancing the case for interesting and efficient education within the demanding context of a rapidly changing urban context. That said Cohen and Mohl (1979, p. 20) consider that 'Wirt was a capitalist at heart' whose free market thinking came to emphasise individualism over collectivism. As such, Wirt (especially in his later years) became more associated with progressivism 'as a conservative-orientated movement - one which sought to reassert the dominance of elites in society and politics, one which sought to restore the freedom of the individual which was fast disappearing before the forces of immigration, industrialization and urbanization' (Cohen & Mohl, 1979, p. 173). This is different to Dewey's lifelong commitment to personal growth in conjunction with building democratically driven social cohesion in local communities. It might be considered therefore that the mix of administrative efficiency and pedagogical enterprise found at the Gary Schools around the period 1914-1915 was one which was capable of benefitting both Dewey and Wirt in their respective ways. For Wirt, it played a useful role in expanding the national prominence of the Gary Plan and for Dewey it was helpful in drawing upon Wirt's work for practical examples of how his

beliefs were being taken forward in public schooling contexts. This view is consistent with Cohen and Mohl (1979) who consider that the Gary Schools Plan is a useful context through which to compare democratic and revisionists interpretations of change in education in early 20<sup>th</sup> century America.

In reviewing the extent to which pedagogical progressivism can inform and drive educational reforms in Scotland it is noticeable that the focus on retaining comprehensive schools and urgently trying to close the attainment gap (with all the benefits this would yield for promoting equity and opportunity) are more pedagogically progressive than in many other countries. And apart from qualified examples such as the Gary Schools Plan they are more progressive than American attempts to engage with new industrial age living a century ago. However, as noted earlier, devolved school management intentions can be interpreted in different ways, so monitoring whether this leads to greater progressive or administrative progressivism requires ongoing review. For as Dewey (1899/2008) reminds us the difficulty with the administrative side of education is that it can make retaining the sense of the school as an inclusive community more difficult to foster. Furthermore, current attempts in Scotland to embrace pedagogical progressivism could founder on the rocks of its own intentions if enough checks and balances are not in place to reign in excessive boldness relative to societal wishes and relative to the costs of funding state education during a time of economic restraint and unpredictability. Therefore, given that the next national elections in Scotland (for which education is a devolved government responsibility) are not until 2019, it cannot be ruled out that in future years, the current politically left of centre nationalist government in Scotland will need to engage more forthrightly with aspects of a more administrative progressive agenda. Accordingly, the settled endorsement for

comprehensive schooling in Scotland ‘a mutual system not a market system’ (Scottish Government, 2016a, p. 10) should not mask a number of interrelated administrative and pedagogical challenges, for example, of considering how the planned increase in directly funding schools can avoid fragmentation between schools in terms of how they enact comprehensive schooling principles i.e., liberty, equality and fraternity. Within the detail of these concerns is the need for greater elaboration on precisely how measures aimed at closing the attainment gap will benefit individual learners *and* Scottish society. This was a matter of concern with the Gary Schools Plan as Wirt predominantly perceived using choice and independence as an efficiency control mechanism and for satisfying the labour needs of business. In this light, choice was more socially conservative than socially progressive, and consequently there are points of John Dewey’s enthusiasm for the Gary Schools Plan which appear - a century on - somewhat misplaced.

## References

- Angus DL and Mirel, JE (1999) *The Failed Promise of the American High School, 1890-1995*. New York: Teachers College Press.
- Bourne RS (1916/1970) *The Gary Schools*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Byrce TGK and Humes, WH (2013) The Distinctiveness of Scottish Education. In: TGK Bryce, WH Humes, D Gillies & A Kennedy (Eds.), *Scottish Education* (pp. 50-63). Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- Cameron A (2013) Local Authority Support. In: TGK Bryce, WH Humes, D Gillies & A Kennedy (Eds.), *Scottish Education* (pp. 198-208). Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- Cavanagh J (2013) Leadership, Management and Organisation in the Secondary School. In: TGK Bryce, WH Humes, D Gillies & A Kennedy (Eds.), *Scottish Education* (pp. 392-402). Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- Cohen RD and Mohl RA (1979) *The Paradox of Progressive Education: The Gary Plan and Urban Schooling*. Port Washington, NY, Kennikat Press.

- Cohen RD (2002) *Children of the Mill: Schooling and Society in Gary, Indiana, 1906-1960*. New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Cremin LA (1961) *The Transformation of the School: Progressivism in American Education, 1896-1957*. Knopf: New York.
- Dewey, J. (1896/1973) Interest in Relation to the Training of the Will. In J. J. McDermott (Ed.), *The Philosophy of John Dewey: The lived experience* (pp. 421-441). New York: Capricorn Books.
- Dewey J (1897/1973) My pedagogical creed. In: JJ McDermott (Ed.), *The Philosophy of John Dewey: The lived experience* (442-453). New York: Capricorn.
- Dewey, J. (1899/2008) *The Child and the Curriculum including The School and Society*. New York: Cosimo Classics.
- Dewey J (1913/1969) *Interest and Effort in Education*. Bath: Cedric Chivers.
- Dewey J (1916/1980) Democracy in Education. In: JA Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey: The Middle Works (1899-1924) Volume 9* (pp. 1-402). Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press.
- Dewey J and Dewey E 1915/1980. Schools of Tomorrow. In: JA Boydston (Ed.), *John Dewey: The Middle Works (1899-1924) Volume 9* (pp. 205-404). Carbondale: Southern Illinois Press.
- Drew V (2013) Curriculum for Excellence in the Secondary School. In: TKG Bryce, WH Humes, D Gillies & A Kennedy (Eds.), *Scottish Education* (pp. 501-511). Edinburgh: University of Edinburgh Press.
- Flexner, A., & Bachman, F. P. (1918/1970). *The Gary Schools: A General Account*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Humes WH (1986) *The Leadership Class in Scottish Education*. Edinburgh: John Donald.
- Labaree, DF (2005) Progressivism, Schools and Schools of Education: An American Romance, *Pedagogica Historica*, 41 (1-2) 275-288.
- Lagemann EC (1989) The Plural Worlds of Educational Research, *History of Education Quarterly*, 29 (2) 185-214.
- Levine A and Levine M (1970) *Introduction to the New Edition, The Gary Schools*. Cambridge, Massachusetts: The MIT Press.
- Paterson, L. (2014) Competitive opportunity and liberal culture: the significance of Scottish education in the twentieth century, *British Educational Research Journal*, 40 (2) 397-416.

- Priestley M and Humes WH (2010) The Development of Scotland's Curriculum for Excellence: amnesia and déjà vu, *Oxford Review of Education*, 36 (3) 345-361.
- Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development. (2015) Improving schools in Scotland: an OECD perspective. Retrieved from <http://www.oecd.org/education/school/Improving-Schools-in-Scotland-An-OECD-Perspective.pdf>
- Reese WJ (2012) Foreward. In RD Cohen (Ed.), *Children of the Mill: Schooling and Society in Gary, Indiana, 1906-1960* (pp. ix-xviii). New York: RoutledgeFalmer.
- Reese WJ (2013) In search of American progressives and teachers, *History of Education*, 42 320-334.
- Scottish Executive (2004) *A curriculum for excellence: The Curriculum Review Group*. Edinburgh, Scottish Executive.
- Scottish Government (2008) *Curriculum for Excellence: Building the Curriculum 3: A Framework for Learning and Teaching*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2009) *Building the Curriculum 4: skills for learning, skills for life and skills for work*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2011) *Teaching Scotland's Future: Report of a review of teacher education in Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2014) *Education Working For All! Commission for Developing Scotland's Young Workforce*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2016a) *Delivering Excellence and Equity in Scottish Education: A Delivery Plan for Scotland*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Scottish Government (2016b) *Empowering Teachers, Parents and Communities to Achieve Excellence and Equity in Education: A Governance Review*. Edinburgh: Scottish Government.
- Author (2016)
- Tyack D (1974) *The One Best System: A History of American Urban Education*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press.
- Westbrook RB (1991) *John Dewey and American Democracy*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press.